

What Filipinos Want—Independence

By AARON H. ULM

THERE are two standard ways of writing about the Philippines, if we judge by the bulk of the matter regarding that land published in the general prints. One is a comical and the other sensational. Both ways are the result of a like point of view long prevalent in the American editorial mind. It is that the American public knows little and cares less about the Philippines and the Filipinos. Hence to interest the reading public in the subject—so reason many editors—you must tickle its funny bone or shock its sensibilities. Therefore everybody knows about the Igorotes or so-called head-hunters of Northern Luzon and the Sultan of Sulu and his largely imaginary amuck-running followers. There, in a broad sense, knowledge possessed by the average American concerning the Philippines begins and ends, which means that we know virtually nothing about that country which for nearly a quarter of a century has been intimately associated with our history, and which is likely to influence our history for a long time in the future; for the Igorotes and the Sultan of Sulu and his Mohammedan subjects bear relation to the Philippines and Filipinos in about the same proportion that the North American Indians and the Southern Negroes bear upon all the United States and its entire citizenry.

It is very important that the average American learn something about the Philippines and its peoples, for our connection with them is approaching a crisis the determination of which may bear potentially upon the lives of oncoming generations. The question involves many points of general and especially foreign policy, the latter relating to that great and yet to be solved Far Eastern problem that, unless wisely handled, may some day shake the pillars of world stability more radically than did the recent war.

The crisis in the Philippine question involves the retention or non-retention of that land and its peoples as appendages of the United States. Within the next few years it must be handled and determination made of the subject perhaps for all future time. For more than twenty years a decision has been to a large extent evaded and postponed, but the time is approaching when that policy can no longer apply.

The Filipinos have fully determined to bring the issue to a point of lasting and exact decision, despite American indifference, which indifference, therefore, must be quickly brought to an end.

And in that no one can blame the Filipinos, who very naturally are tired of the annoying position which might be described as that of dangling on the end of a stick of uncertainty.

The Filipinos not only demand definite decision as to their future and permanent status, but also want that decision to accord with their own wishes. But what are their wishes as to the future? What do they really want? Those are questions that must be answered before the American public, if ever awakened from its lethargy on the Philippine question, can get a fair perspective of the problem to be solved. So far they have not been answered very clearly. In order to get as nearly as possible definite answers to them, the writer put the questions to one of the two most authoritative Filipinos in the United States, Jaime C. DeVeyra, Resident Commissioner from the Philippine Islands in Congress.

"What the Filipinos want," said Mr. DeVeyra, "is independence."

"But what do you mean by independence?" he was asked.

"That is hard to define, for we are not in position to define it," he replied. "The definition must be drawn by the United States Congress. In the main we can only express our desire to receive and our willingness to accept whatever form of independence your country may be good enough to grant us. We have our preference, which is absolute independence, but you must remember that we come as supplicants, not even as complainants, in full appreciation of the fact that your country and your people have interests which you have the right to protect. If you ask for our preferences in the order of their choice I should say they are as follows:

"First. Absolute independence under the League of Nations.

"Second. Independence under an American protectorate.

"Third. Independence by agreement as to our neutrality on the part of interested powers like the United States, Japan and Great Britain.

"Fourth. Absolute independence without the League of Nations, or an American protectorate or guaranty of neutrality by interested powers.

"These arrangements would be safe for the Filipinos, the United States and the peace of the world in the order of their statement. Each is predicated on full governmental and national autonomy for the Filipino people and in line with pledges made and frequently renewed since American occupation of the islands, which pledges are now clearly written into the laws of your country.

"In truth, if the policy to which the United States is clearly pledged is pursued, there are only two points to be decided. One is the element of time. Under the defined policy of your government the question of complete independence for the Philippines has been decided. The Jones Act, now operative, guarantees complete independence as soon as stable native government is established in the Philippines. The only question at issue with regard to that point, then, is as to whether stable government has been established or when it will be established. You will find, as I shall undertake to point out in some detail, that stable government by the Filipinos has already been established. Therefore,

if that fact, which I think no one thoroughly conversant with the subject will deny, is accepted, the time element only awaits further action by Congress.

"The next point has to do with collateral arrangements with your government alone or with yours and other governments. They can be arrived at best through direct discussion between representatives of the Philippine nation and your country, or other countries, after the first point is settled; that is to say, after complete independence has become a fact.

"The League of Nations offers for that a solution which should be satisfactory to our people, your people and all other peoples. In other words, your grant of complete independence could be followed by the admission of the Philippine state to membership in the League and it would thereby be granted the protection and guaranties which the League affords so-called weak nations.

"We are not so vain as to assert that, upon our being set entirely free, we should be in position to set up as a great power, or that, for at least some time, we should be able to repel any great nation that might attempt to violate our neutrality. In that, however, we should be in no sense singular, for that is the situation of the majority and many of the oldest nations on the earth, to protect which the League of Nations was created.

"Hence if the League of Nations should fail definitely to materialize, we shall gladly accept independence under an American protectorate, provided your Congress decides that the interests of all concerned make such an arrangement desirable. We are willing even, if you insist, that your grant of complete in-

dependence carry a 'string,' so to speak, like the Platt Amendment in the act that set up the independent government of Cuba. That amendment, as you know, stands between the Cubans and foreign nations that might undertake to undermine Cuban independence by extending zones of influence, via financial obligations. It also empowers the United States to intervene in Cuban domestic affairs in case of internal trouble jeopardizing order in Cuba.

"But a proviso like the Platt Amendment would not be as applicable to a grant of Philippine independence as it was in the case of Cuba. That country is close to your own borders, remote from other conflicting interests and had virtually no experience in self-government. My country is on the other side of the world and belongs to another hemisphere as well as another continent. We are surrounded by many conflicting interests that would check one against the other in the interest of Philippine neutrality. Concretely, the British with their vast Chinese and South Sea interests wouldn't stand idly by and see Japan, for example, unduly extend its influence over the Philippines, and vice versa, Japan couldn't safely let British influence become too dominant.

"Then, through American benevolence, for which we are rightly grateful, we are well trained in self-government, and in the matter of internal troubles would face no more danger than all countries have faced. You must not forget that your own enlightened country had its terribly devastating Civil War.

"The third proposal is for complete independence, accompanied by agreement between such countries as the United States, Japan and Great Britain guaranteeing our neutrality. That I have no doubt could be easily arranged; in fact, a premier of the Japanese government openly asserted that his would be among the first powers to underwrite Philippine neutrality.

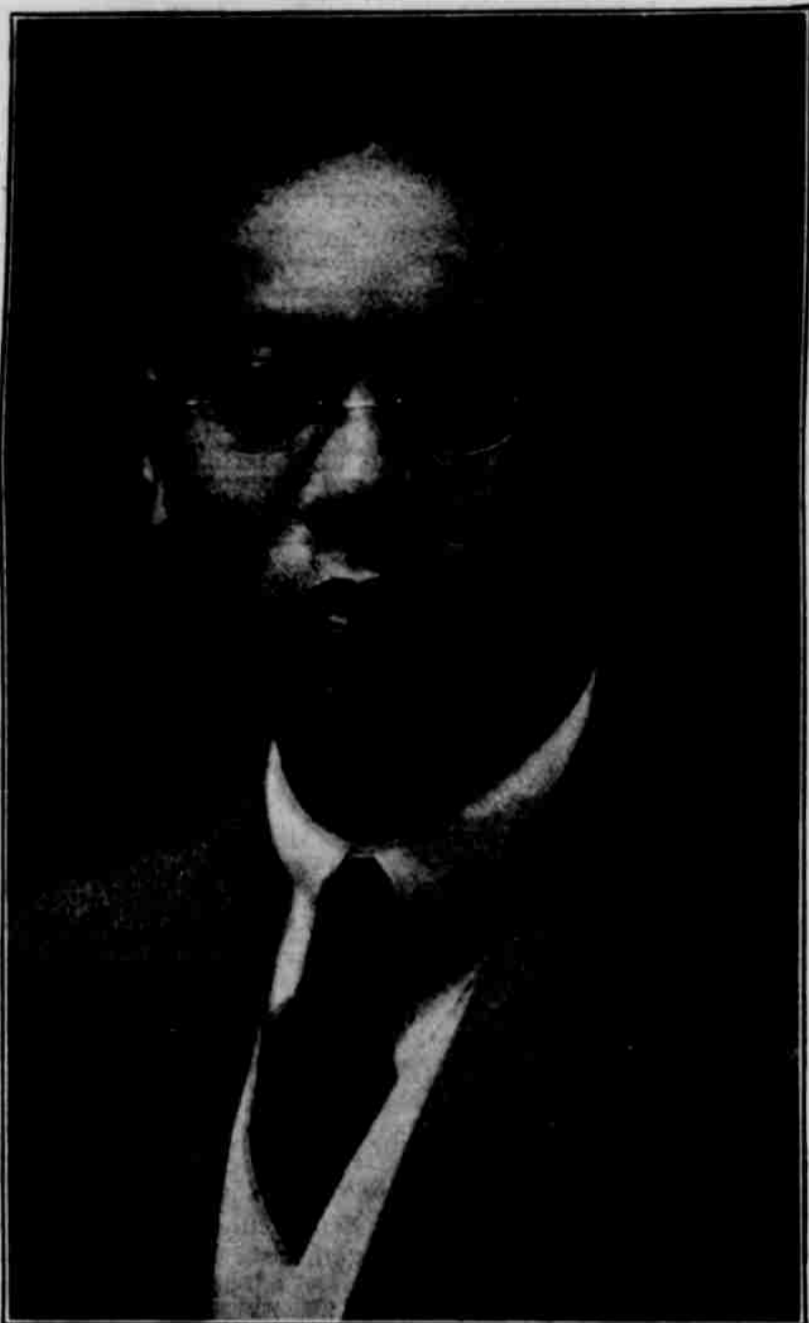
"But if no one of the three arrangements specified is feasible, we shall welcome absolute independence without 'strings' in the way of reservations, agreements or outside protection of any kind. And I am sure we would make good on that basis. Furthermore, such an arrangement would be less hazardous to the United States than the one which now prevails. For in all probability any great war of the future in which you should be involved would have at least a partial Far Eastern setting; and your greatest problem would be to defend the Philippines, regardless of whether that land had anything directly to do with the war. Take war between America and Japan, for example, and the first thing Japan would do under the present arrangement of affairs would be to invade the Philippine Islands, not because they would want the islands but because, in a fight with you, that would be the best strategy. With the islands free, there would be no occasion for Japan making attack upon you there, and you would thus be in better position to defend territory nearer home.

"Of course barring attack by some great power before we would have time to prepare for defense, the Filipinos are now amply able to take care of themselves. That danger of assault is one that is faced theoretically by all small nations and cannot be argued logically against granting to us complete independence. In our case, for reasons in part already given, I believe it inconsequential. Since Germany has been driven from the Far East, Japan is the only great power that would even theoretically threaten Philippine neutrality. But the Japanese have never shown even scant desire for the annexation of the Philippines. We were astonished when a census taken only a short time ago showed only a few more than 6,000 Japanese residents in the islands. Most of us believed there were at least 10,000 Japanese there, and even that number would be small when you think of the nearness of crowded Japan and the great undeveloped commercial opportunities in the Philippines. Under Filipino government the Japanese would be free to carry on business with and in the islands, without having to incur the precarious obligations of enforced rulership, and, for many reasons, they would prefer to deal with the Philippines independently. The Japanese don't take well to the tropics. In other words, Japan would have more to lose than to gain by acquiring the Philippines, unless the acquirement was merely subsidiary to a war undertaking in which other factors entered, as might be the case if war should occur between Japan and the United States before your connection with the Philippines is broken.

"In all matters of purely domestic import the Filipinos have clearly demonstrated ability to take care of themselves. For three years we have been practically independent; that is to say, under the Jones Act, as wisely and generously carried out by your government, we have been to all intents and purposes autonomous. We have our own legislature, our own provincial and municipal governments, and have been able to shape, virtually without restraint, all our internal policies.

"If that is the case, some one may ask, why should we want more; why shouldn't we be satisfied with a relation to the United States somewhat similar to that of Canada and Australia to the British Empire? There are several reasons why our situation is not analogous to that of either the great dominion or the great commonwealth. Those two branches of the British Empire are peopled by Anglo-Saxon stock, with Anglo-Saxon culture and traditions. They evolved naturally as off-shoots of British stock.

"While we appreciate the great traditions of freedom and liberty that are inherent to the Anglo-Saxon, and have made those traditions our own, we are still not Anglo-Saxon. No matter how closely entwined the



Jaime C. DeVeyra, Resident Commissioner from the Philippines in the United States Congress. He is a highly educated man, and has had long experience in governmental matters.



A Filipino public school in session.